



**Sonoma County Continuum of Care Strategic Planning
Agenda Report**

Item No: 1
Subject: June 16, 2023 Strategic Planning Meeting Agenda
Meeting Date: June 16, 2023
Staff Contact: Alea Tantarelli, Alea.Tantarelli@Sonoma-County.org

SUMMARY

This staff report presents the June 16, 2023 CoC Strategic Planning Committee Meeting proposed agenda. The agenda contains all proposed items that will be discussed by the Strategic Planning Committee. The proposed agenda is attached as Attachment A.

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S)

Approve June 16, 2023 agenda.

Attachment A

**Sonoma County Continuum of Care (CoC) Strategic Planning Committee
Agenda for June 16, 2023
9:00am-10:00am Pacific Time**

Virtual Meeting: Join Zoom Webinar

<https://sonomacounty.zoom.us/j/94233222676?pwd=TIExUDVFdnRpSFkrVGQzSmxZMS9BZz09>

Passcode: 976436 Webinar ID: 942 3322 2676 Telephone: 1 669 900 9128

	Agenda Item	Packet Item	Presenter	Time
	Welcome, Roll Call and Introductions		Tom Bieri /Alea Tantarelli	9:00am
1.	Approve Agenda (ACTION ITEM)	06/16/23 Agenda	Tom Bieri	9:05am
2.	Approve Minutes (ACTION ITEM)	04/21/23 Minutes	Tom Bieri	9:07am
3.	Proposed Format and Structure of the Strategic Planning Committee (ACTION ITEM)	1) Strategic Planning Committee Direction from CoC Board 2) Proposed Strategic Planning Committee Format & Structure 3) Rosenberg's Rules of Order	Tom Bieri	9:10am
4.	Strategic Plan Accountability (Potential ACTION ITEM)		Tom Bieri	9:30am
5.	Strategic Planning Year 1 Priority Update (Potential ACTION ITEM)		Dave Kiff	9:40am
6.	Public Comment on Non-agendized Items		Tom Bieri	9:55am

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Public Comment may be made via email or during the live zoom meeting. To submit an emailed public comment to the Committee email Araceli.Rivera@sonoma-county.org. Please provide your name, the agenda number(s) on which you wish to speak, and your comment. These comments will be emailed to all Committee members. Public comment during the meeting can be made live by joining the Zoom

meeting. Available time for comments is determined by the Chair based on agenda scheduling demands and total number of speakers.

Sonoma County Continuum of Care Board Strategic Planning Committee Minutes

Committee members: Chair Tom Bieri | Co-Chair Ben Leroy | Secretary, Rebekah Sammet |
Dennis Pocekay, Tom Bieri, Ludmilla Bade,
Rebekah Sammet, Jennielynn Holmes, Ben Leroy, Matt Barnes, Julia Gaines, Jennifer Harte, Angela Struckman, Tim Miller,
Wendell Coleman

Strategic Planning Committee Minutes for April 21, 2023

1. **9:00am WELCOME/CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL-Alea**
 - a. **DHS Staff Present:** Alea Tanterelli, Michael Gase, Dave Kiff,
 - b. **Members Present:** Dennis Pocekay, Tom Bieri. Ludmilla Bade, Rebekah Sammet, Jennielynn Holmes, Ben Leroy, Matt Barnes, Julia Gaines, Jennifer Harte
 - c. **Absent:** Angela Struckman, Tim Miller, Wendell Coleman
2. **9:10am AGENDA APPROVAL: Passed**
3. **9:12am APPROVE MINUTES FROM 11/18/2022 & 11/28/2022 MEETINGS:**
 - a. **MOTION to approve the minutes made by _Jennifer Hart_ second by Tom Bieri_ . Motion passed**
4. **9:15 am Elect Strategic Planning Committee Chair & Secretary (ACTION ITEM)**

NOMINATION BY Tom Bieri (Self+Ben Leroy) for Chair

NOMINATION BY Ben Leroy (Tom Bieri) for Chair

NOMINATION BY Ludmilla (self) for Co-chair

Tom would accept a Vice Chair to his Chair nomination not co-chair

MOTION by Ludmilla to close nominations, Rebekah Seconds- passed unanimously

MOTION by Ben Leroy to elect Tom Bieri as Chair and Ludmilla as Vice Chair, Jennifer Seconds-passed unanimously

NOMINATION BY Rebekah (self) for Secretary Second by Tom Bieri -passed unanimously

Public Comment-none

9:25am Strategic Planning Year 1 Priority Update (Potential ACTION ITEM)

- a. Discussion led by Dave Kiff. Slides of the year 1 strategy priorities
- b. Thai Hilton explains BFZ/BNL update. Thai updates further on Subregional approach for outreach and BNL. He reached out to other communities that are implementing subregional outreach. Thai looks forward to having a complete Prioritization process and scale by end of 2023 (ambitious goal)
- c. Michael Gause leads update on how CoC transferred from CDC to DHS. DHS is planning to add newsletters, website and social media for CoC updates.
- d. NOFA/Measurer O recommendations to be announced this week. Street outreach spearheaded by Andrew Henning, not many proposals submitted.
- e. -No action Taken

Member Questions/Comments: Tom Bieri [motions to create a Coordinated Entry Redesign Committee](#). He mentions the need for more stakeholder involvement for aligning the CE process with Strat Plan and that the process seems to be being led too



Sonoma County Continuum of Care Board Strategic Planning Committee Minutes

Committee members: Chair Tom Bieri | Co-Chair Ben Leroy | Secretary, Rebekah Sammet |
Dennis Pocekay, Tom Bieri, Ludmilla Bade,
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Wendell Coleman

much by staff. Dave Kiff mentions there's already a Coordinated Entry Committee. Thai explains where HomeFirst is with the CE redesign process, that there has been community engagement about it, also HUD lacks guidance for vulnerability assessment design so there's a lot of new ideas needing to be developed. Ben Leroi is on CE Comm. expresses the process is taking longer than anticipated, which shows much stakeholder is indeed being gathered. JennieLynn echoes Ben Leroi, good input takes more time, yet it's worth it. Rebekah asks if CE and BFZ can be combined? Thai explains BFZ is not about vulnerability assessment, would be distracting. BFZ is for outreach and reaching regional coverage. Although outreach workers will be using the vulnerability assessment to input client info into CE. [Tom Bieri withdrawals motion](#). Welcomes robust conversation, transparency. Thai offers that the process can be transferred away from the lead agency if CoC or board determines. Ludmilla talks about communication priority strategy, outreach should promote more community awareness of CoC Board.
No Public comment

5. 9:40am Strategic Plan and Funding Plan Alignment (Potential ACTION ITEM)

- a. Discussion led by Micheal Gause-mentions hiring strategic planning agency to assist with implementation of Strat Plan beyond year 1. Long-term only funding strategy to be discussed.
 - b. Tom Bieri reads Strat Plan item #3.6e CE strives to be client centered... Encourages RFP and Priorities to be carefully aligned to promote provider more liberty to make safety decisions for their facilities (such as exits for safety reasons) so that providers are not punished for legally exiting someone for safety reasons when that impacts their housing retention rate. The County currently provides funding related scores to providers on housing retention. Rebekah mentions appreciation for LE voices being heard in the processes.
 - c. -No action taken
6. No public comment.
 7. Dave mentions the willingness to meet with Ludmilla to respond to her email about suggestions to running the Managed Camp more person centered-per her advice. Ludmilla mentions the need for it to function more friendly, less prison-like.
 8. Alea reminds the committee to send suggested topics for future meeting agendas to her, or chair.
 9. 9:55am Public comment on non-agendized items:
 - a. None
 10. 9:59 adjourned



**Sonoma County Continuum of Care Board
Agenda Report**

Item No: 12
Subject: Strategic Planning Committee Direction
Meeting Date: February 22, 2023
Staff Contact: Dave Kiff, Division Director, DHS Homelessness Services Division
Dave.Kiff@sonoma-county.org

SUMMARY

The Sonoma County Continuum of Care Board (CoC Board) created its Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) in June 2021. The SPC's mission was to spearhead the development of a countywide, community-informed, and person-centered plan that is inclusive, equitable, coordinated, and outcome based, and to report back regularly to the CoC Board on the Plan's progress. The SPC did this, with significant success.

In collaboration with Homebase, and through a robust community engagement process that involved three SPC working groups and more formal monthly (and sometimes semi-monthly) SPC meetings, the Strategic Plan was completed. The Plan was approved by the CoC Board on December 14, 2022 and by the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors on January 31, 2023.

At the request of the CoC Board, Lead Agency staff spent some time thinking about what role the SPC might play in the advancement and implementation of the Plan in 2023 and beyond.

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S)

Select one of the below recommendations as future direction for the CoC Strategic Planning Committee (the first recommendation is staff's recommendation):

- 1) That the Strategic Planning Committee:
 - a. Seek new and returning members, and
 - b. Continue to meet as a Committee in a public setting every other month for one focused hour. During this hour, staff will provide updates, engage stakeholders in the implementation process, and answer any outstanding Committee and public questions about Strategic Plan progress;
 - c. Work with staff to develop a convenient and transparent tracking system to follow Action Plan items, especially for Year 1;
 - d. Report back to the CoC Board directly following each SPC bi-monthly meeting on Strategic Plan progress (or lack thereof); and

- e. Sunset and thank the Committee's working groups, instead bringing any remaining work to the SPC for follow-ups.
- 2) As possible alternatives to Recommendation #1:
- a. Meet with the CoC Strategic Planning Committee one final time to thank them and then dissolve the Committee and workgroups. Direct that all Strategic Planning progress updates be done directly with the CoC Board; or
 - b. Continue regular meetings with the CoC Strategic Planning Committee (1.5 hour monthly meeting) and its Coordinated System of Care workgroup.

DISCUSSION

As we reviewed options for the SPC, we were cognizant of the extensive amount of time that went into the Strategic Plan's development by SPC members. Meetings were regularly-held, in public (on Zoom), full of information, and a place for robust discussion and debate.

Representatives from cities, the County, service providers, and Lived Experience communities were invaluable to the SPC's success and to the Plan's successful completion and adoption. Staff is very thankful for the Committee members' participation and engagement.

Moving forward, it is critical that the Plan be activated, especially its 2023 action items. We know, too, that there should be a CoC body that reviews progress with staff. But it's an open question as to what body that might be – the SPC or the CoC Board itself. Or, alternatively, both – with different roles for each.

Staff discussed this both internally and with the CoC Board chairs. We believe that retaining and making new appointments to the SPC, with a less intensive meeting schedule combined with more targeted and focused sessions (targeted just on progress on the Plan), will be beneficial to the Plan and its process. This will help recruit and retain new SPC members and should reduce the amount of time that the CoC Board needs to spend delving deeply into Plan progress. Retaining and refining the role of the SPC also respects past community involvement and may help ensure continued investment and community accountability to the Plan.

We recommend this acknowledging that meetings are challenging and time consuming to support and staff. And that good attendance is often based on the perceived usefulness of meetings. Taking this into consideration, a one-hour meeting every other month, with regular Plan updates and tracking/reporting mechanisms, and new members to the SPC, might be the best option. We also suggest sunsetting the SPC's three working groups (Increasing Income, Housing, and Coordinated System of Care) as these items are well-placed within the purview of the SPC and can be discussed there without additional staff and Committee member meeting time.

Seeking new members for the Committee will be important, as the two leaders of the SPC in 2022, Tom Schwedhelm and Stephen Sotomayor, have stepped back from their Committee roles and are no longer serving on the CoC Board (we miss them already). Given the action items in the Strategic Plan, we respectfully recommend that the Board (should it maintain the SPC) target new applicants to the SPC from Lived Experience, Black and Indigenous communities, health care, service provision, data presentation and evaluation, communications, governments, legal aid, 211, and the business community (such as property owner representation).

Regardless of the Board's decision, it is important to recognize publicly the participation in 2021 and 2022 of the SPC members. The Board may wish to consider ways to thank these individuals more formally.

We look forward to the Board's discussion of this item and your direction.

ATTACHMENTS:

A: Approved CoC Strategic Plan:

https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Main%20County%20Site/Development%20Services/CDC/Homeless%20Services/Continuum%20of%20Care/Strategic%20Plan/SonomaCountyStrategicPlan_CoCA_dopted-12142022.pdf

B: Current CoC Strategic Planning Committee Roster:

<https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/development-services/community-development-commission/divisions/homeless-services/continuum-of-care/committees/strategic-planning-committee>

Proposed Format and Structure for Strategic Planning Committee

(Drafted by Tom Bieri)

We propose that we start meeting in-person as soon as possible to improve engaged participation. We also propose that the agendas that we create include a balance of staff reporting out on progress made along with time set aside for committee members and the public to ask questions related to implementation of the strategic plan.

Some of the areas which we will encourage staff to report out on and various stakeholders to ask questions about include how collectively we are making progress in four important areas of our strategic plan:

- 1) Funding
- 2) Equity
- 3) Safety
- 4) Communication

The following is a list of strategies and action steps related to these four elements in the Sonoma County Continuum of Care Strategic Plan as approved by the Sonoma County CoC Board on December 14, 2022.

Funding:

Pg. 18 - **Housing First is viewed by State and Federal funders as essential (and required) to receive State and Federal funding for homelessness solutions.** Given the evidence supporting Housing First's effectiveness, as well as the significant funding tied to it, 3 this Plan embraces a Housing First approach for Sonoma County.

Pg. 26 -

V. Fund new and renewing programs that have demonstrated success in supporting people experiencing homelessness in achieving housing stability. The homeless system of care should strive for a funding ratio of up to 80% to existing, evidence-based, or proven programs and 20% to innovative or "promising practice" program concepts with evaluation plans.

Pg 29 -

1.2d: With opening of Caritas' Center and its Nightingale beds, evaluate the current need for medical respite/recuperative care, develop lessons learned from past efforts, and secure funding to meet the outstanding need with the goal of reducing the strain on temporary housing capacity

Pg 31 -

- Increasing funding for capital development given it cannot carry debt in permanent supportive housing projects.

Pg 32 - 10 The California Department of Housing and Community Development's Prohousing Designation Program provides incentives to cities and counties in the form of points or preference in the scoring of competitive housing, community development, and infrastructure

programs. Preference may include priority processing or funding points when applying for funding including Affordable Housing & Sustainable Communities, Infill Infrastructure Grant, Transformative Climate Communities, and Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program. More information can be found here <https://www.hcd.ca.gov/planning-and-community-development/prohousing-designation-program>.

34 - 2.2b: Leverage CalAIM's Enhanced Care Management and Community Supports programs to assist in funding intensive care coordination across multiple systems.

2.2h: Develop and report annually on how a needs-based funding allocation for the CoC did or did not reflect population alignment with the Point in Time Count.

35 -

2.4b: Secure a neutral facilitator to bring County and sector leaders together to align services, funding, and goals.

36 - Action Steps

3.1a: Task the CoC Funding and Evaluation Committee with monitoring ongoing, expiring, and new funding sources to make recommendations to the CoC Board.

3.1b: Adopt a long-term funding strategy that can align resources to support the Plan's goals, strategies, and actions steps (see 1.2a; 1.3a; 2.1a; 3.2a; 3.8a for key funding related strategies).

3.1c: Develop a shared service vision and procurement process (consistent with established procurement rules) when funding opportunities within the county that can be received by and awarded to multiple jurisdictions (i.e. County, CoC, Housing Authority).

3.1d: Provide ongoing outreach, coordination, and technical assistance to prospective funding applicants to build confidence and capacity in providers.

3.1e: Create an annual calendar of funding opportunities and related processes to allow jurisdictions and providers to better plan and coordinate activities.

37 -

3.3a: Provide standing opportunities for input from the Sonoma County Lived Experience Advisory and Planning (LEAP) and (when established) Youth Action Boards at CoC Board (including the Strategic Planning Committee), City Council and Board of Supervisors meetings, and by invitation to other meetings regarding available funding awards and service delivery.

3.2d: Identify agencies and partners who are led by people of color and/or who offer cultural-specific services. Examine the system to ensure those agencies and partners have the resources necessary to apply for, secure, and successfully administer homeless services funding.

39 -

3.5e: Develop funding streams from the private sector, philanthropic organizations, and private donors to support individual providers.

42 -

- Adopt a long-term funding strategy for homeless services (3.1b)

43 -

Refer to table of possible funding for “countywide early implementation efforts”

Equity

5 - **Strategy 3.2:** Prioritize funding to entities that align with local priorities to promote equity, center the voices of people with lived experience, and utilize evidence-based practices

9 -

3. Operate as One Coordinated System. It won’t shock Sonoma County readers to know that the homeless system of care could be more streamlined, effective, and equitable; easier to understand; and supportive of all individuals seeking help rather than perpetuating a system that says, “we don’t do that - they do.”

14 -

o **VI-SPDAT** – Some stakeholders raised concerns about the CE system’s assessment tool – the VI-SPDAT. Concerns include the tool’s equity implications (i.e. that it may bias the prioritization of housing placement against people of color/BIPOC), its intrusiveness, the trauma it may recreate, its inflexibility, and the repetitiveness of the process.

26 -

VI. Develop a new vulnerability assessment, prioritization, and placement process that results in equitable housing placement. A year after use, examine (and revise if needed), to ensure that BIPOC individuals/families receive equitable placement.

37 -

3.2b: Incorporate equity goals into performance measures and invest in programs closing equity gaps, disaggregating data by age, race, ethnicity, and language.

3.2d: Identify agencies and partners who are led by people of color and/or who offer cultural-specific services. Examine the system to ensure those agencies and partners have the resources necessary to apply for, secure, and successfully administer homeless services funding.

40 -

3.7f: Build up Equity-Centered Results-Based Accountability (RBA) framework.

55 -

• **14 Stakeholder Focus Groups** centered around the following themes and groups: o Promoting Racial Equity

Safety

7 - Strategy 3.6: Improve Transparency, Safety, and Effectiveness of the Coordinated Entry System

17 - **Encampments** – Stakeholders called for a more consistent and coordinated approach toward addressing encampments of homeless individuals. People with lived experience of homelessness were particularly concerned about efforts to remove people from land when there is nowhere else for them to go. And when they must relocate, they lose touch with outreach workers, access to community, and their sense of safety. They called for more supported, alternative housing options such as tiny home villages, safe parking, and sanctioned encampments.

22 - Providers called for greater investment in physical improvements to existing shelters to maximize non-congregate space. This will promote safety, recovery, autonomy, and housing stability.

30 - **FIVE practices that can enhance the effectiveness of Safe Parking programs: 3**

I. **Intentional design** – Ensuring that the design of the program is well-suited to the entity sponsoring it. Small organizations, for example, may have difficulty operating distributed-site models. Umbrella organizations such as governments or large nonprofits may need to partner with other entities to establish and support programs on smaller lots where a sense of community and connectedness can help maintain safety and ensure program success.

33 -

2.1f: Ensure providers are equipped with safety plans and adequate security personnel to handle emergencies such as violence or medical crisis.

35 –

2.5c: Evaluate existing service provider managed encampments to determine the effectiveness of the intervention in supporting households to achieve housing stability. If managed encampments are determined to be appropriate, consider funding following the setting of protocols and standards to ensure safety, provide supportive services, and maintain a housing-focus.

40 - **Strategy 3.6: Improve Transparency, Safety, and Effectiveness of the Coordinated Entry System**

Action Steps

3.6a: Use the By Names List (BNL) methodology to better account for all persons experiencing homelessness in the county and in alignment with Built for Zero (BFZ).¹⁵

3.6b: Coordinate encampment solutions and management based on agreed-upon regional priorities such as threats to public health and safety (fire, waterways), organization and size of encampment, and more.

3.6c: Facilitate case conferencing around PSH referrals, prioritization, retention, and service right-sizing. Develop a prioritization hierarchy for placement into supportive housing (linked to Action Step 1.3b).

3.6d: Incorporate existing local and countywide by names lists into HMIS.

3.6e: Ensure that the Coordinated Entry process maintains a person-centered approach that involves the respectful consideration of the following factors:

- Client Choice
- Client Needs
- Safety Considerations
- The Value of Reducing Barriers
- Provider Capacity, Expertise, and Competency

Communication:

Strategy 3.5: **Engage the Community in the Effort to End Homelessness** in Sonoma County
Action Steps

3.5a: Communications Plan. Convene the County communications team, city information teams, and outside assistance to effectively and regularly inform the CoC Board, the County, cities, service providers, the media, the public, and persons experiencing homelessness as to current issues, funding, practices, and programs in the Sonoma County System of Care.

Information should include:

- Social media posts and print media content.
- Regular opportunities for the public to speak with and ask questions of key officials within the System of Care, including members of the LEAP Board.
- A dashboard of data and key metrics associated with the System of Care (as shown in 3.4a), including comparisons to State and National data, as well as trends over the previous 3-year period.
- Progress made on this Strategic Plan.
- Content relevant to persons experiencing homelessness; and
- Content relevant to diverse audiences, using culturally competent methods and translations.

3.5b: Develop and regularly distribute materials that explain and educate about the local causes of homelessness.

3.5c: Develop materials to explain the use and success of evidence-based best practices.

3.5d: Organize regular and consistent opportunities for community support such as calls to action, funding needs, donation drives, job fairs, housing opportunities, shadowing opportunities for interested parties/the public with service providers, etc.

3.5e: Develop funding streams from the private sector, philanthropic organizations, and private donors to support individual providers.

APPENDIX A: EARLY ACTION STEPS Lead Agency Initial 2023 Efforts The Lead Agency (Sonoma County Community Development Commission) will begin 2023 with the following Early Implementation Efforts (listed in full in the section that follows):

- Develop a robust communication strategy to keep the public and individuals experiencing homelessness more informed of services, policy changes, challenges, and successes (3.5a)



Rosenberg's Rules of Order

REVISED 2011

Simple Rules of Parliamentary Procedure for the 21st Century

By Judge Dave Rosenberg



MISSION AND CORE BELIEFS

To expand and protect local control for cities through education and advocacy to enhance the quality of life for all Californians.

VISION

To be recognized and respected as the leading advocate for the common interests of California's cities.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dave Rosenberg is a Superior Court Judge in Yolo County. He has served as presiding judge of his court, and as presiding judge of the Superior Court Appellate Division. He also has served as chair of the Trial Court Presiding Judges Advisory Committee (the committee composed of all 58 California presiding judges) and as an advisory member of the California Judicial Council. Prior to his appointment to the bench, Rosenberg was member of the Yolo County Board of Supervisors, where he served two terms as chair. Rosenberg also served on the Davis City Council, including two terms as mayor. He has served on the senior staff of two governors, and worked for 19 years in private law practice. Rosenberg has served as a member and chair of numerous state, regional and local boards. Rosenberg chaired the California State Lottery Commission, the California Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board, the Yolo-Solano Air Quality Management District, the Yolo County Economic Development Commission, and the Yolo County Criminal Justice Cabinet. For many years, he has taught classes on parliamentary procedure and has served as parliamentarian for large and small bodies.



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INTRODUCTION

The rules of procedure at meetings should be simple enough for most people to understand. Unfortunately, that has not always been the case. Virtually all clubs, associations, boards, councils and bodies follow a set of rules — *Robert's Rules of Order* — which are embodied in a small, but complex, book. Virtually no one I know has actually read this book cover to cover. Worse yet, the book was written for another time and for another purpose. If one is chairing or running a parliament, then *Robert's Rules of Order* is a dandy and quite useful handbook for procedure in that complex setting. On the other hand, if one is running a meeting of say, a five-member body with a few members of the public in attendance, a simplified version of the rules of parliamentary procedure is in order.

Hence, the birth of *Rosenberg's Rules of Order*.

What follows is my version of the rules of parliamentary procedure, based on my decades of experience chairing meetings in state and local government. These rules have been simplified for the smaller bodies we chair or in which we participate, slimmed down for the 21st Century, yet retaining the basic tenets of order to which we have grown accustomed. Interestingly enough, *Rosenberg's Rules* has found a welcoming audience. Hundreds of cities, counties, special districts, committees, boards, commissions, neighborhood associations and private corporations and companies have adopted *Rosenberg's Rules* in lieu of *Robert's Rules* because they have found them practical, logical, simple, easy to learn and user friendly.

This treatise on modern parliamentary procedure is built on a foundation supported by the following four pillars:

1. **Rules should establish order.** The first purpose of rules of parliamentary procedure is to establish a framework for the orderly conduct of meetings.
2. **Rules should be clear.** Simple rules lead to wider understanding and participation. Complex rules create two classes: those who understand and participate; and those who do not fully understand and do not fully participate.
3. **Rules should be user friendly.** That is, the rules must be simple enough that the public is invited into the body and feels that it has participated in the process.
4. **Rules should enforce the will of the majority while protecting the rights of the minority.** The ultimate purpose of rules of procedure is to encourage discussion and to facilitate decision making by the body. In a democracy, majority rules. The rules must enable the majority to express itself and fashion a result, while permitting the minority to also express itself, but not dominate, while fully participating in the process.

Establishing a Quorum

The starting point for a meeting is the establishment of a quorum. A quorum is defined as the minimum number of members of the body who must be present at a meeting for business to be legally transacted. The default rule is that a quorum is one more than half the body. For example, in a five-member body a quorum is three. When the body has three members present, it can legally transact business. If the body has less than a quorum of members present, it cannot legally transact business. And even if the body has a quorum to begin the meeting, the body can lose the quorum during the meeting when a member departs (or even when a member leaves the dais). When that occurs the body loses its ability to transact business until and unless a quorum is reestablished.

The default rule, identified above, however, gives way to a specific rule of the body that establishes a quorum. For example, the rules of a particular five-member body may indicate that a quorum is four members for that particular body. The body must follow the rules it has established for its quorum. In the absence of such a specific rule, the quorum is one more than half the members of the body.

The Role of the Chair

While all members of the body should know and understand the rules of parliamentary procedure, it is the chair of the body who is charged with applying the rules of conduct of the meeting. The chair should be well versed in those rules. For all intents and purposes, the chair makes the final ruling on the rules every time the chair states an action. In fact, all decisions by the chair are final unless overruled by the body itself.

Since the chair runs the conduct of the meeting, it is usual courtesy for the chair to play a less active role in the debate and discussion than other members of the body. This does not mean that the chair should not participate in the debate or discussion. To the contrary, as a member of the body, the chair has the full right to participate in the debate, discussion and decision-making of the body. What the chair should do, however, is strive to be the last to speak at the discussion and debate stage. The chair should not make or second a motion unless the chair is convinced that no other member of the body will do so at that point in time.

The Basic Format for an Agenda Item Discussion

Formal meetings normally have a written, often published agenda. Informal meetings may have only an oral or understood agenda. In either case, the meeting is governed by the agenda and the agenda constitutes the body's agreed-upon roadmap for the meeting. Each agenda item can be handled by the chair in the following basic format:

First, the chair should clearly announce the agenda item number and should clearly state what the agenda item subject is. The chair should then announce the format (which follows) that will be followed in considering the agenda item.

Second, following that agenda format, the chair should invite the appropriate person or persons to report on the item, including any recommendation that they might have. The appropriate person or persons may be the chair, a member of the body, a staff person, or a committee chair charged with providing input on the agenda item.

Third, the chair should ask members of the body if they have any technical questions of clarification. At this point, members of the body may ask clarifying questions to the person or persons who reported on the item, and that person or persons should be given time to respond.

Fourth, the chair should invite public comments, or if appropriate at a formal meeting, should open the public meeting for public input. If numerous members of the public indicate a desire to speak to the subject, the chair may limit the time of public speakers. At the conclusion of the public comments, the chair should announce that public input has concluded (or the public hearing, as the case may be, is closed).

Fifth, the chair should invite a motion. The chair should announce the name of the member of the body who makes the motion.

Sixth, the chair should determine if any member of the body wishes to second the motion. The chair should announce the name of the member of the body who seconds the motion. It is normally good practice for a motion to require a second before proceeding to ensure that it is not just one member of the body who is interested in a particular approach. However, a second is not an absolute requirement, and the chair can proceed with consideration and vote on a motion even when there is no second. This is a matter left to the discretion of the chair.

Seventh, if the motion is made and seconded, the chair should make sure everyone understands the motion.

This is done in one of three ways:

1. The chair can ask the maker of the motion to repeat it;
2. The chair can repeat the motion; or
3. The chair can ask the secretary or the clerk of the body to repeat the motion.

Eighth, the chair should now invite discussion of the motion by the body. If there is no desired discussion, or after the discussion has ended, the chair should announce that the body will vote on the motion. If there has been no discussion or very brief discussion, then the vote on the motion should proceed immediately and there is no need to repeat the motion. If there has been substantial discussion, then it is normally best to make sure everyone understands the motion by repeating it.

Ninth, the chair takes a vote. Simply asking for the “ayes” and then asking for the “nays” normally does this. If members of the body do not vote, then they “abstain.” Unless the rules of the body provide otherwise (or unless a super majority is required as delineated later in these rules), then a simple majority (as defined in law or the rules of the body as delineated later in these rules) determines whether the motion passes or is defeated.

Tenth, the chair should announce the result of the vote and what action (if any) the body has taken. In announcing the result, the chair should indicate the names of the members of the body, if any, who voted in the minority on the motion. This announcement might take the following form: “The motion passes by a vote of 3-2, with Smith and Jones dissenting. We have passed the motion requiring a 10-day notice for all future meetings of this body.”

Motions in General

Motions are the vehicles for decision making by a body. It is usually best to have a motion before the body prior to commencing discussion of an agenda item. This helps the body focus.

Motions are made in a simple two-step process. First, the chair should recognize the member of the body. Second, the member of the body makes a motion by preceding the member’s desired approach with the words “I move . . .”

A typical motion might be: “I move that we give a 10-day notice in the future for all our meetings.”

The chair usually initiates the motion in one of three ways:

1. **Inviting the members of the body to make a motion**, for example, “A motion at this time would be in order.”
2. **Suggesting a motion to the members of the body**, “A motion would be in order that we give a 10-day notice in the future for all our meetings.”
3. **Making the motion**. As noted, the chair has every right as a member of the body to make a motion, but should normally do so only if the chair wishes to make a motion on an item but is convinced that no other member of the body is willing to step forward to do so at a particular time.

The Three Basic Motions

There are three motions that are the most common and recur often at meetings:

The basic motion. The basic motion is the one that puts forward a decision for the body’s consideration. A basic motion might be: “I move that we create a five-member committee to plan and put on our annual fundraiser.”

The motion to amend. If a member wants to change a basic motion that is before the body, they would move to amend it. A motion to amend might be: “I move that we amend the motion to have a 10-member committee.” A motion to amend takes the basic motion that is before the body and seeks to change it in some way.

The substitute motion. If a member wants to completely do away with the basic motion that is before the body, and put a new motion before the body, they would move a substitute motion. A substitute motion might be: “I move a substitute motion that we cancel the annual fundraiser this year.”

“Motions to amend” and “substitute motions” are often confused, but they are quite different, and their effect (if passed) is quite different. A motion to amend seeks to retain the basic motion on the floor, but modify it in some way. A substitute motion seeks to throw out the basic motion on the floor, and substitute a new and different motion for it. The decision as to whether a motion is really a “motion to amend” or a “substitute motion” is left to the chair. So if a member makes what that member calls a “motion to amend,” but the chair determines that it is really a “substitute motion,” then the chair’s designation governs.

A “friendly amendment” is a practical parliamentary tool that is simple, informal, saves time and avoids bogging a meeting down with numerous formal motions. It works in the following way: In the discussion on a pending motion, it may appear that a change to the motion is desirable or may win support for the motion from some members. When that happens, a member who has the floor may simply say, “I want to suggest a friendly amendment to the motion.” The member suggests the friendly amendment, and if the maker and the person who seconded the motion pending on the floor accepts the friendly amendment, that now becomes the pending motion on the floor. If either the maker or the person who seconded rejects the proposed friendly amendment, then the proposer can formally move to amend.

Multiple Motions Before the Body

There can be up to three motions on the floor at the same time. The chair can reject a fourth motion until the chair has dealt with the three that are on the floor and has resolved them. This rule has practical value. More than three motions on the floor at any given time is confusing and unwieldy for almost everyone, including the chair.

When there are two or three motions on the floor (after motions and seconds) at the same time, the vote should proceed *first* on the *last* motion that is made. For example, assume the first motion is a basic “motion to have a five-member committee to plan and put on our annual fundraiser.” During the discussion of this motion, a member might make a second motion to “amend the main motion to have a 10-member committee, not a five-member committee to plan and put on our annual fundraiser.” And perhaps, during that discussion, a member makes yet a third motion as a “substitute motion that we not have an annual fundraiser this year.” The proper procedure would be as follows:

First, the chair would deal with the *third* (the last) motion on the floor, the substitute motion. After discussion and debate, a vote would be taken first on the third motion. If the substitute motion *passed*, it would be a substitute for the basic motion and would eliminate it. The first motion would be moot, as would the second motion (which sought to amend the first motion), and the action on the agenda item would be completed on the passage by the body of the third motion (the substitute motion). No vote would be taken on the first or second motions.

Second, if the substitute motion *failed*, the chair would then deal with the second (now the last) motion on the floor, the motion to amend. The discussion and debate would focus strictly on the amendment (should the committee be five or 10 members). If the motion to amend *passed*, the chair would then move to consider the main motion (the first motion) as *amended*. If the motion to amend *failed*, the chair would then move to consider the main motion (the first motion) in its original format, not amended.

Third, the chair would now deal with the first motion that was placed on the floor. The original motion would either be in its original format (five-member committee), or if *amended*, would be in its amended format (10-member committee). The question on the floor for discussion and decision would be whether a committee should plan and put on the annual fundraiser.

To Debate or Not to Debate

The basic rule of motions is that they are subject to discussion and debate. Accordingly, basic motions, motions to amend, and substitute motions are all eligible, each in their turn, for full discussion before and by the body. The debate can continue as long as members of the body wish to discuss an item, subject to the decision of the chair that it is time to move on and take action.

There are exceptions to the general rule of free and open debate on motions. The exceptions all apply when there is a desire of the body to move on. The following motions are not debatable (that is, when the following motions are made and seconded, the chair must immediately call for a vote of the body without debate on the motion):

Motion to adjourn. This motion, if passed, requires the body to immediately adjourn to its next regularly scheduled meeting. It requires a simple majority vote.

Motion to recess. This motion, if passed, requires the body to immediately take a recess. Normally, the chair determines the length of the recess which may be a few minutes or an hour. It requires a simple majority vote.

Motion to fix the time to adjourn. This motion, if passed, requires the body to adjourn the meeting at the specific time set in the motion. For example, the motion might be: “I move we adjourn this meeting at midnight.” It requires a simple majority vote.

Motion to table. This motion, if passed, requires discussion of the agenda item to be halted and the agenda item to be placed on “hold.” The motion can contain a specific time in which the item can come back to the body. “I move we table this item until our regular meeting in October.” Or the motion can contain no specific time for the return of the item, in which case a motion to take the item off the table and bring it back to the body will have to be taken at a future meeting. A motion to table an item (or to bring it back to the body) requires a simple majority vote.

Motion to limit debate. The most common form of this motion is to say, “I move the previous question” or “I move the question” or “I call the question” or sometimes someone simply shouts out “question.” As a practical matter, when a member calls out one of these phrases, the chair can expedite matters by treating it as a “request” rather than as a formal motion. The chair can simply inquire of the body, “any further discussion?” If no one wishes to have further discussion, then the chair can go right to the pending motion that is on the floor. However, if even one person wishes to discuss the pending motion further, then at that point, the chair should treat the call for the “question” as a formal motion, and proceed to it.

When a member of the body makes such a motion (“I move the previous question”), the member is really saying: “I’ve had enough debate. Let’s get on with the vote.” When such a motion is made, the chair should ask for a second, stop debate, and vote on the motion to limit debate. The motion to limit debate requires a two-thirds vote of the body.

NOTE: A motion to limit debate could include a time limit. For example: “I move we limit debate on this agenda item to 15 minutes.” Even in this format, the motion to limit debate requires a two-thirds vote of the body. A similar motion is a *motion to object to consideration of an item*. This motion is not debatable, and if passed, precludes the body from even considering an item on the agenda. It also requires a two-thirds vote.

Majority and Super Majority Votes

In a democracy, a simple majority vote determines a question. A tie vote means the motion fails. So in a seven-member body, a vote of 4-3 passes the motion. A vote of 3-3 with one abstention means the motion fails. If one member is absent and the vote is 3-3, the motion still fails.

All motions require a simple majority, but there are a few exceptions. The exceptions come up when the body is taking an action which effectively cuts off the ability of a minority of the body to take an action or discuss an item. These extraordinary motions require a two-thirds majority (a super majority) to pass:

Motion to limit debate. Whether a member says, “I move the previous question,” or “I move the question,” or “I call the question,” or “I move to limit debate,” it all amounts to an attempt to cut off the ability of the minority to discuss an item, and it requires a two-thirds vote to pass.

Motion to close nominations. When choosing officers of the body (such as the chair), nominations are in order either from a nominating committee or from the floor of the body. A motion to close nominations effectively cuts off the right of the minority to nominate officers and it requires a two-thirds vote to pass.

Motion to object to the consideration of a question. Normally, such a motion is unnecessary since the objectionable item can be tabled or defeated straight up. However, when members of a body do not even want an item on the agenda to be considered, then such a motion is in order. It is not debatable, and it requires a two-thirds vote to pass.

Motion to suspend the rules. This motion is debatable, but requires a two-thirds vote to pass. If the body has its own rules of order, conduct or procedure, this motion allows the body to suspend the rules for a particular purpose. For example, the body (a private club) might have a rule prohibiting the attendance at meetings by non-club members. A motion to suspend the rules would be in order to allow a non-club member to attend a meeting of the club on a particular date or on a particular agenda item.

Counting Votes

The matter of counting votes starts simple, but can become complicated.

Usually, it’s pretty easy to determine whether a particular motion passed or whether it was defeated. If a simple majority vote is needed to pass a motion, then one vote more than 50 percent of the body is required. For example, in a five-member body, if the vote is three in favor and two opposed, the motion passes. If it is two in favor and three opposed, the motion is defeated.

If a two-thirds majority vote is needed to pass a motion, then how many affirmative votes are required? The simple rule of thumb is to count the “no” votes and double that count to determine how many “yes” votes are needed to pass a particular motion. For example, in a seven-member body, if two members vote “no” then the “yes” vote of at least four members is required to achieve a two-thirds majority vote to pass the motion.

What about tie votes? In the event of a tie, the motion always fails since an affirmative vote is required to pass any motion. For example, in a five-member body, if the vote is two in favor and two opposed, with one member absent, the motion is defeated.

Vote counting starts to become complicated when members vote “abstain” or in the case of a written ballot, cast a blank (or unreadable) ballot. Do these votes count, and if so, how does one count them? The starting point is always to check the statutes.

In California, for example, for an action of a board of supervisors to be valid and binding, the action must be approved by a majority of the board. (California Government Code Section 25005.) Typically, this means three of the five members of the board must vote affirmatively in favor of the action. A vote of 2-1 would not be sufficient. A vote of 3-0 with two abstentions would be sufficient. In general law cities in

California, as another example, resolutions or orders for the payment of money and all ordinances require a recorded vote of the total members of the city council. (California Government Code Section 36936.) Cities with charters may prescribe their own vote requirements. Local elected officials are always well-advised to consult with their local agency counsel on how state law may affect the vote count.

After consulting state statutes, step number two is to check the rules of the body. If the rules of the body say that you count votes of “those present” then you treat abstentions one way. However, if the rules of the body say that you count the votes of those “present and voting,” then you treat abstentions a different way. And if the rules of the body are silent on the subject, then the general rule of thumb (and default rule) is that you count all votes that are “present and voting.”

Accordingly, under the “present and voting” system, you would **NOT** count abstention votes on the motion. Members who abstain are counted for purposes of determining quorum (they are “present”), but you treat the abstention votes on the motion as if they did not exist (they are not “voting”). On the other hand, if the rules of the body specifically say that you count votes of those “present” then you **DO** count abstention votes both in establishing the quorum and on the motion. In this event, the abstention votes act just like “no” votes.

How does this work in practice?

Here are a few examples.

Assume that a five-member city council is voting on a motion that requires a simple majority vote to pass, and assume further that the body has no specific rule on counting votes. Accordingly, the default rule kicks in and we count all votes of members that are “present and voting.” If the vote on the motion is 3-2, the motion passes. If the motion is 2-2 with one abstention, the motion fails.

Assume a five-member city council voting on a motion that requires a two-thirds majority vote to pass, and further assume that the body has no specific rule on counting votes. Again, the default rule applies. If the vote is 3-2, the motion fails for lack of a two-thirds majority. If the vote is 4-1, the motion passes with a clear two-thirds majority. A vote of three “yes,” one “no” and one “abstain” also results in passage of the motion. Once again, the abstention is counted only for the purpose of determining quorum, but on the actual vote on the motion, it is as if the abstention vote never existed — so an effective 3-1 vote is clearly a two-thirds majority vote.

Now, change the scenario slightly. Assume the same five-member city council voting on a motion that requires a two-thirds majority vote to pass, but now assume that the body **DOES** have a specific rule requiring a two-thirds vote of members “present.” Under this specific rule, we must count the members present not only for quorum but also for the motion. In this scenario, any abstention has the same force and effect as if it were a “no” vote. Accordingly, if the votes were three “yes,” one “no” and one “abstain,” then the motion fails. The abstention in this case is treated like a “no” vote and effective vote of 3-2 is not enough to pass two-thirds majority muster.

Now, exactly how does a member cast an “abstention” vote?

Any time a member votes “abstain” or says, “I abstain,” that is an abstention. However, if a member votes “present” that is also treated as an abstention (the member is essentially saying, “Count me for purposes of a quorum, but my vote on the issue is abstain.”) In fact, any manifestation of intention not to vote either “yes” or “no” on the pending motion may be treated by the chair as an abstention. If written ballots are cast, a blank or unreadable ballot is counted as an abstention as well.

Can a member vote “absent” or “count me as absent?” Interesting question. The ruling on this is up to the chair. The better approach is for the chair to count this as if the member had left his/her chair and is actually “absent.” That, of course, affects the quorum. However, the chair may also treat this as a vote to abstain, particularly if the person does not actually leave the dais.

The Motion to Reconsider

There is a special and unique motion that requires a bit of explanation all by itself; the motion to reconsider. A tenet of parliamentary procedure is finality. After vigorous discussion, debate and a vote, there must be some closure to the issue. And so, after a vote is taken, the matter is deemed closed, subject only to reopening if a proper motion to consider is made and passed.

A motion to reconsider requires a majority vote to pass like other garden-variety motions, but there are two special rules that apply only to the motion to reconsider.

First, is the matter of timing. A motion to reconsider must be made at the meeting where the item was first voted upon. A motion to reconsider made at a later time is untimely. (The body, however, can always vote to suspend the rules and, by a two-thirds majority, allow a motion to reconsider to be made at another time.)

Second, a motion to reconsider may be made only by certain members of the body. Accordingly, a motion to reconsider may be made only by a member who voted in the majority on the original motion. If such a member has a change of heart, he or she may make the motion to reconsider (any other member of the body — including a member who voted in the minority on the original motion — may second the motion). If a member who voted in the minority seeks to make the motion to reconsider, it must be ruled out of order. The purpose of this rule is finality. If a member of minority could make a motion to reconsider, then the item could be brought back to the body again and again, which would defeat the purpose of finality.

If the motion to reconsider passes, then the original matter is back before the body, and a new original motion is in order. The matter may be discussed and debated as if it were on the floor for the first time.

Courtesy and Decorum

The rules of order are meant to create an atmosphere where the members of the body and the members of the public can attend to business efficiently, fairly and with full participation. At the same time, it is up to the chair and the members of the body to maintain common courtesy and decorum. Unless the setting is very informal, it is always best for only one person at a time to have the floor, and it is always best for every speaker to be first recognized by the chair before proceeding to speak.

The chair should always ensure that debate and discussion of an agenda item focuses on the item and the policy in question, not the personalities of the members of the body. Debate on policy is healthy, debate on personalities is not. The chair has the right to cut off discussion that is too personal, is too loud, or is too crude.

Debate and discussion should be focused, but free and open. In the interest of time, the chair may, however, limit the time allotted to speakers, including members of the body.

Can a member of the body interrupt the speaker? The general rule is “no.” There are, however, exceptions. A speaker may be interrupted for the following reasons:

Privilege. The proper interruption would be, “point of privilege.” The chair would then ask the interrupter to “state your point.” Appropriate points of privilege relate to anything that would interfere with the normal comfort of the meeting. For example, the room may be too hot or too cold, or a blowing fan might interfere with a person’s ability to hear.

Order. The proper interruption would be, “point of order.” Again, the chair would ask the interrupter to “state your point.” Appropriate points of order relate to anything that would not be considered appropriate conduct of the meeting. For example, if the chair moved on to a vote on a motion that permits debate without allowing that discussion or debate.

Appeal. If the chair makes a ruling that a member of the body disagrees with, that member may appeal the ruling of the chair. If the motion is seconded, and after debate, if it passes by a simple majority vote, then the ruling of the chair is deemed reversed.

Call for orders of the day. This is simply another way of saying, “return to the agenda.” If a member believes that the body has drifted from the agreed-upon agenda, such a call may be made. It does not require a vote, and when the chair discovers that the agenda has not been followed, the chair simply reminds the body to return to the agenda item properly before them. If the chair fails to do so, the chair’s determination may be appealed.

Withdraw a motion. During debate and discussion of a motion, the maker of the motion on the floor, at any time, may interrupt a speaker to withdraw his or her motion from the floor. The motion is immediately deemed withdrawn, although the chair may ask the person who seconded the motion if he or she wishes to make the motion, and any other member may make the motion if properly recognized.

Special Notes About Public Input

The rules outlined above will help make meetings very public-friendly. But in addition, and particularly for the chair, it is wise to remember three special rules that apply to each agenda item:

Rule One: Tell the public what the body will be doing.

Rule Two: Keep the public informed while the body is doing it.

Rule Three: When the body has acted, tell the public what the body did.



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